



AI LEADERS PODCAST APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Ahmad Aladawi [00:00:00] The apprenticeship program just changed the whole game for me. It's provided me with the excellent career opportunity, I would say, along with all the tools that anyone needs to be successful.

Terri Rinella [00:00:18] Hello and welcome to the AI Leaders podcast. I'm Terri Rinella, a managing director in our consumer goods industry at Accenture with a personal passion for helping our people to be successful. Our topic today explores the skill gap in the corporate world in nontraditional places where Fortune 500 companies and other employers are starting to recruit talent in this digital jobs economy. The fun part is that we're going to explore this through the eyes of Ahmad Aladawi, who has an inspiring story to share on his journey that brought him to Accenture. Ahmad, thanks for being here today.

Ahmad Aladawi [00:00:54] Hi, Terry. Thank you for having me. Happy to be here also.

Terri Rinella [00:00:57] Well, let's go ahead and get started. Ahmad, can you share your story of how you came to Accenture?

Ahmad Aladawi [00:01:03] So I would like to start, I think my story when I came to United States eight years ago, that was in 2014. So back home, I actually studied business administration for a few years, but unfortunately, I wasn't able to transfer my school credit to U.S. School system. So, I had to start over in 2014 right after I came, which it was unfortunate to start everything from the beginning. But in the same time, I think it was an opportunity for me and a big motivation to start a new major, which is, you know, working in security and studying everything related to IT, which is I always loved and wanted to do. So back then I started going to Chicago community colleges and take some ESL classes for a few months

and from there start taking a college credit to work on my own, my associate degree in information technology and through one of the organization that I work with in college, which was a nonprofit organization called 1 Million Degree. They told me about the apprenticeship program and through them I was able to get some support to get me on the right track to apply for the program and go through multiple interviews that just landed me at Accenture and at the apprenticeship program that they start in 2017.

Terri Rinella [00:02:38] Wonderful. It's an incredible journey from where you started to where you came to. Maybe as a little further context for our listeners about the apprenticeship program. So, Accenture actually established it back in 2016, shortly before you joined and a year later co-founded the Chicago Apprenticeship Network, along with Aon in Zurich, Zurich, America. They were then partnered with local employers like McDonald's, JPMorgan Chase and Walgreens to jumpstart some of their apprenticeship programs. And now we've, along with AON have developed a national playbook to help other organizations expand the model and launched in nine other cities, engaging 130 employers and creating 2000 apprenticeships as of last August. So, I think it's a really exciting time and a really exciting program. I would love to hear a little bit more about your experience in the apprenticeship program.

Ahmad Aladawi [00:03:38] In the program. Just open the door for me at the time when I really needed it. I was too in the community college, coming from a foreign country and working on my associate degree and still learning the language. I did not know where to start. I was always thinking it's going to be very challenging and almost impossible for me to start a big career and just because I didn't have any experience back then. But the apprenticeship program just changed the whole



game for me. It's provided me with the excellent career opportunity, I would say, along with all the tools that anyone needs to be successful. And I actually still remember my first day as apprentice when I walked in into my assigned team room and they were having a meeting with Microsoft, talking about different solutions and security solutions that I did not understand any of it. I thought it will be very challenging for me because, you know, like such a new thing for me and I don't have that experience there, but I think because the great culture, what everyone at Accenture and through the program, they're willing to help and the opportunity to learn and all the tools out there that Accenture provided. I work hard for a few months, and I was able to be the person who leads the communication with Microsoft. That related to my team. So, I thought that it just something great that Accenture and the program offer where someone was no experience can get all this in a few months. So, all it takes from me is just to have the potential and work hard for it. But everything is out there. So, I think the program just offers something that will be great for any student or any a person who really wanted to do something and improve their career path. And I can see the program now actually as part of my lifestyle from like working on my career and making me a better person in the community who can, you know, add value and make a difference to himself and more important to others. Because as now I'm an ambassador of the program and part of my work is to work with every day was new joiners and also work with the leaderships of the program to help the new joiner with their journey and make sure they are on the right track and make their journey successful as it was for me. And I think that is the main thing that made this program very powerful and important.

Terri Rinella [00:06:22] Yeah, I think what's interesting, you know, apprenticeship programs kind of have that earn and learn model where you're able to get formal learning with a combination of paid on the job experiences. And it sounds like you've been able to also not just be coached, but also then turn around and be able to coach some of the additional apprentices that have joined join the organization as well.

Ahmad Aladawi [00:06:46] Yes, 100%. And yeah, again, I think that's what make the program very

powerful because it just opened a door for everyone. So, anyone who really want to do to work on themselves will be able to. And actually, through my journey I went through multiple schools. So, I start from community college to four-year school. And what I did find and that's something I always love to share, is that there is too many students, specifically in community colleges who have potentials, and they really want to work hard. But it just because there is no opportunity, they end up not having a good career. And in the same time, because a lot of employers, they're always used to hired from top four-year school. So those students in community college, they don't get a chance to get this opportunity and in the same time, maybe they don't have the financial need that, you know, that will allow them to go to our transfer to the four-year school. So, I think the program is just solve both problems for the students. They changed the way we hire employees and give all those students the opportunity to work on their career and just improve their life and also get some financial support like the one I got. What's happened with me actually is, is that I transferred to University of Illinois at Chicago right after I finished my apprenticeship program. So, I was able to do both continue my education and in the same time having a good career where I when I graduated from college, I already had a few years experience with something was not very common back then.

Terri Rinella [00:08:31] I think you're right. I love what I love most about the program is it's not just your typical four-year university graduates. You have like yourself coming from a community college. I've met some of your other Apprentice colleagues who come from technology training programs or are veterans coming from the military. It's really refreshing to see that we know there's so much talent out there. There just hasn't always been the opportunity to connect the jobs that are there to some of the different variety of backgrounds that individuals have, which I think is amazing. I think the other thing that's interesting, as you mentioned, is the apprenticeship program is really mutually beneficial official. So, it's you know, it's great for yourself as an individual and your colleagues, but also it helps the employers reach untapped talent that they just didn't know where to go to or have access to before. So, you're right. And at Accenture, we found this program to be hugely successful. You know, since we started our own program in 2016,



we've brought on more than 2000 apprentices in 40 cities across North America. Of that total, the majority are from diverse backgrounds and nearly half are female. We even announced a goal to fill 20% of our entry level roles as apprentices in North America last year. So, I think it has a really good trajectory of where it's going. Ahmad, can you share a little bit then about your experience moving from the apprenticeship program to being a full-time member of Accenture?

Ahmad Aladawi [00:10:07] Sure. So, the program, it was one year long. I started it in 2017 and it end in 2018. And what really, I still remember back then that it was no change between being an apprentice to being a full-time employee, which it just shows how great the program is, how it treats everyone the same. For me, I was like, anyone on my team have the same responsibilities and getting the assigned task. So, I think it was just great to have this one year full of experience. And from there I actually remain in information security, what I started, but it just moved between multiple projects, and I learned on multiple solutions. They all related to security, which is I love. So, I learned a lot on different platforms such as Microsoft Information Technology, Azure Security, SAP, and also some of the DLP solutions. And since then, the main focus was for all the projects that I work with that working with the team to create the security solutions that will help Accenture and the company to better protect the resource and the data we have. And recently, a few months ago, I started working on a new project, which is a remote access project where we deal with a VPN and different remote access solutions. And the focus there for us is to make sure we are able to identify all of them and in the same time make sure that all people who use those solutions there use them in a secure way. And if they are not any of the above solution, we help them to migrate to one of our secure solutions and that we are able to measure the compliance for and that not violating our standards.

Terri Rinella [00:12:20] That's awesome. And I

love your enthusiasm. I love your enthusiasm for the program. And it's really exciting to hear that. You know, it's obviously pretty clear the benefits from an individual like yourself. I think also just in the from an employer perspective, you know, there's a lot of statistics out there. Fortune published they shared Wylie's report that 68% of C-suite executives admit their organizations have a skill gap. Forbes even shared an and digital research that 285 billion of Britain's economic growth is at risk between now and 2026 if the nation doesn't tackle the digital skills gap. And even I think this one's interesting. The World Economic Forum did a job report Future of Jobs in 2020 and predicted that 50% of employees globally will need reskilling by 2025. So, these kinds of programs and the things that you're learning now is exciting because I think we're going to continue to need to reskill and we're going to continue. So, these apprenticeship programs can be really impactful to employers who are living the skill gap challenge. So, Ahmad, I would, I think, ask you then as a final question, what advice would you give to individuals like yourself, as well as even employers who might be thinking of starting apprenticeship programs?

Ahmad Aladawi [00:13:45] I actually would love to share a message and send it to the employers specifically who are considering starting apprenticeship program in their organization and enter the community there. I really wanted to say that this program, we already know it works. It's worked for more than 50 organizations and in many industries, and it also works for thousands of apprentices. So, we should all benefit here. It's absolutely a win-win situation for both organization and individuals who are looking for a career path and who are willing to work hard and prove themselves. And actually, another thing that personally, as a former apprentice and a person who came to this country eight years ago, he really wanted to say that you're not only benefiting your firm and adding more talented people to your organization, but you're also entering a community that changed lives and improves how the economy and the economy and the world works. For me, I always say the program is for sure one of those stocks that will never go down. And if they want to add one more last thing, that will be for any individuals who are looking for a career opportunity, I will say, here we go. The program is there, the door is open. All you have to do is to apply to work hard for it and just make sure you focus your potential on what you're looking to do. And that is all



the tools that you need to be successful out there.
So, all you need is just to get started.

Terri Rinella [00:15:23] Ahmad, such an inspiring story. Thank you for joining us today. And if our listeners are interested in learning more about the apprenticeship programs we talked about, you can visit our podcast page for more information.

Ahmad Aladawi [00:15:36] Thank you, Terri.